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ABSTRACT

The expansion of early childhood education for American Indians and Alaska Natives has reflected the trend in the larger society. While efforts are being made to improve early childhood care and education for all children, deeper issues must be considered by Native Americans. First among them is the long history of forced assimilation and attempted acculturation of Native Americans into the mainstream society. Native American children must be allowed to maintain their Native identities and retain the unique strengths embedded in their cultures. Programs for young Native children must be designed within the context of each child's culture, home language, and family. Successful programs encourage parent involvement, use parents and community members as resources, offer parents educational opportunities, and link home learning with school learning. The current definition of readiness focuses the blame for early school failure on the child. Instead, schools should support the culturally bound and individually determined readiness skills with which children come to school. Additional strategies for early childhood programs are: involving the community in curriculum development and educational policy formation; training more Native teachers and administrators through incentives and alternative certification procedures; supporting socioculturally relevant evaluation including cultural awareness courses in teacher training; hiring Native aides; increasing Head Start availability; and promoting Native language use. This paper contains 115 references. (SV)

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Early Childhood Education in American Indian and Alaska Native Communities

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Introduction

Early childhood education for American Indians and Alaska Natives has not been a financial priority among the vast needs of health, housing, drug abuse, school dropout, and building an economic base among most American Indian tribes and Alaska Native communities. Early childhood education, however, has not been a federal financial priority for the country at large until recent times when the increased need for early care and education has literally forced an expansion because of the changes in American life that have forced more women into the work force.

If it were not for Head Start programs on many reservations, there would be minimal, if any, organized effort of early childhood education and child care. Reservations have reflected the larger society's trends.

The growing need for early care and education in today's society has also forced a refocusing on the importance of quality child care and effective preschool programs. In November, 1990, the 101st Congress passed legislation addressing early childhood issues — the first in 50 years (NAEYC, 1990a). In addition, Head Start programs have been reauthorized at the highest funding level ever. The attempt is being made to provide full funding to serve all eligible three through five-year-olds by 1994 (NAEYC, 1990a, p. 1).

The President of the United States and the Governors of each of the states met and proclaimed six national performance goals for education. Their first goal has strong implications for early care and education: "Goal 1 — Readiness for School: By the year 2000, all children in America will start school ready to learn" (National Governors' Association, 1990).

As the larger society moves forward in its efforts to improve conditions for child care and education for all children, there are deeper issues that must be considered by the American Indian and Alaska Native.

First among them is the long history of forced assimilation and attempted acculturation of Native Americans into the mainstream society (Paul & Van Otten, 1990). Schools and other institutions have participated in this process which has been singularly unsuccessful. Statistically, the American Indians and Alaska Natives have been the least successful academically of all U.S. minorities. The Native American groups have also experienced the highest school dropout rates, suicide rates, and teen pregnancy among all non-majority populations (Reeves, 1989).

The retaining of their culture has always been a critical concern for Native Americans. Historically, the educational institutions have treated the American Indians and Alaska Natives as if they were a part of the immigrant groups settling the country. However, it is a different issue from that which was faced by immigrants who intentionally came to this country and were anxious to be assimilated into the larger society. These groups wanted to come, rebuild their lives, and become part of what is called the melting pot. Immigrant parents encouraged their children to speak English and adopt the ways of the mainstream culture, thus the young people lost many of their traditions. American Indians and Alaska Natives have never been a part of this immigrant movement. Instead, they were forcibly relocated throughout this country. As part of their history, they were isolated on reservations and have endeavored to salvage their cultural integrity. Forced assimilation continued in the boarding schools, where children were sent to schools with different tribes and mixed together in an effort to assimilate them into the mainstream society.. Because schools have failed to "recognize the importance and validity of the Native community, both the community and its children retaliated by treating the school as an alien institution" (McDonald, 1989c, p. 12).

As Native people, we are at a point in our history where we must join together, review, and make changes that will give our children a more positive self-image which is necessary for success. It is time for Native American people to collectively insist that their children be allowed to maintain their identity as American Indian and Alaska Native tribal members with unique strengths embedded in each culture. The acceptance by

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decision-makers that early intervention is better and that reaching children at an earlier age will make transition into a public school more successful must be questioned in the light of its costs to Native families Programs for young Native children need to be designed within the context of each child's culture, home language and family. This cannot be done without community input and support.

"The first years of a child's learning experience must be connected to that with which he or she is familiar in order to build a foundation for a successful school experience" (Alaska Hearing, Sakeagak, 1990, p. 11).

To support the future of American Indian and Alaska Native children, we must establish this foundation for their development. The foundation for each person begins with one's own self-acceptance.

> I agree with other Native educators that self-esteem is a key to healthy, well-adjusted Native students. I am strongly convinced that a pre-requisite to self-esteem is a strong tribal identity, and tribal identity has to do with language and culture. (Plains States Hearing, Hart, 1990, p. 40)

Culture influences behavior and it affects how the world is viewed.

All children go through similar but critical developmental phases which reflect specific knowledge and skill held as milestones by each culture for their children. Early childhood education literature supports the interdependence of the child's physical, emotional, social, and intellectual development. The development that takes place for each child evolves from the influences he/she receives from family and environment. What actually happens to children as they respond to their environment and the people around them has already been influenced by how a woman cares for herself before the baby is born and what we as adults do after a child is born. Parents recognize that there are individual differences among their children. Some of their children learn to talk earlier than others. Some of them learn to walk before others. Some children start doing things later than others, but all children develop human skills, if there is nothing dramatically wrong, and children do so at their own rate.

A very important developmental phase for American Indian and Alaska Native children is social development. It is through social development, children learn about themselves and their relationship with other people. They learn how to behave toward other children as well as the adults around them and the expectation of them in different settings. These behaviors are learned within the context of their culture. Children learn at a young age the expectations of relationships such as in relating to Elders.

A child's emotional development is greatly affected by how safe and secure he/she is made to feel with the adults with whom they live and learn. The love and support that is shared with children is critical to their sense of belonging to and acceptance by their family and community.

The intellectual development of children is also influenced by a child's environment and the people around them. The way in which children perceive their world and how they understand and learn about their world will depend on the adults around them. One of the most important factors in this phase of development is the learning of language. It is through language that we express our thoughts, beliefs, values, and culture (Plains States Hearing, Hart, p. 40). It is through language that children come to understand the social expectations of their culture.

As children move from the home to wider social settings, such as the neighborhood and the school, the number of influences on the child has grown and may become different in view, practice, and language. Up to now, the beginning experiences with the transition from home to school for Native children have, at best, been marked by very limited success. Efforts to provide the child with a strong foundation for later school success have also been largely unsuccessful. The goals parents have for their children have not been realized nor has the school been able to provide adequate preparation for future school success or for later life productivity.

The Formative Years of a Child Are Critical

Parents must begin to ask what is going to happen to my child as they leave home at a younger age and go to someone else for care? The developmental phases continue for young children, and if we regard the formative years of children's lives as being very critical, they become even more crucial when we begin to look at Native children who are coming from their culture and moving to a culture, which may be different from that of home. As children leave home, and this is more true for younger children, they will encounter increasingly more influences from outside of the family. The kinds of cultural values the family has may become lost.

A Native American community must consider the critical nature of the formative years for their children. Early childhood development must become a priority focus for parents and educators —

whether the child is in the home or is in an organized setting. What we must acknowledge is that what happens to a child in the early years creates the foundation from which he grows. If we make the analogy in thinking about the foundations for buildings: the stronger the base or foundation is the stronger the building is going to be. Likewise, for a child, the stronger the foundation of the formative years, the stronger individual he or she is going to be. We must then as parents and as a community raise the question of what kind of an individual we want our children to become. The attitudes and the values and all of the ways that a child thinks and accepts people and accepts his view of life has to do with the kinds of seeds that are planted early on. As Native people, each community must decide what kind of adults they want their children to become and then evaluate the goals of the educational system that exist to see if they serve their purposes. If not, it is time to intervene.

As Native people within a larger society, we must also remember that our children must be able to live in two worlds and not become caught in between as has happened to too many of our tribal people. If we want to build tribal identity within our children, so they may grow knowing traditions, culture, history, and language, we must instill and maintain the tribal language both in the home and at school.

What schools have been doing is forcing children from their own Native language into the English language, then leaving the responsibility to the home to maintain the Native language. This becomes a very critical issue when you talk about early childhood because children must have a strong grasp of their Native language by the time they are three years old. If not, they may lose it as they move into an English-speaking world, especially if the Native language is not supported, encouraged, and used by the school or in the home. Traditionally, parents of school-aged children have been discouraged from using their Native language at home, in favor of English. Losing the home language moves children away from their Native-speaking Elders and their traditional practices and beliefs.

The school has been sending the message that children must change and must learn the language of the school. It has been reinforcing this message by favoring children who do that. Instead teachers could be saying to a child:

> I wish I could speak two languages like you do. You have a language at home and you have so much information in that language, learning from your parents and grandparents. I only have this one language that I use in school.

A teacher can help children to understand that they come from a rich cultural background, and that their Native languages are different, but that they are equal. Children need to know that it is advantageous to have more than one language (Plains Hearing, Alred, 1990; Hart, 1990). They need to know that knowing two languages gives them two ways to view the world.

Strategies for Developmentally and Culturally Appropriate Early Childhood Education

In every early childhood setting, research supports the active involvement of young children with their environment. Research also supports that it is important to make things relevant to children as illustrated by moving from the familiar to the less familiar. Adults caring for young children should help children explore their surroundings as well as help them use the many creative arts which all children enjoy. All of these activities and more like them can take place in both the Native language and the language of the school. Ideally, the younger-aged children should be taught in their home language.

- Young children profit from being talked with, read to, and being permitted to explore their world. There is no reason why such activities cannot take place in the context of home and school in their Native language.
- Young children need to hear about the important events which constitute the history of their family and tribe. They need to understand the origins of and experience their own traditions before learning about Halloween or St. Patrick's Day.
- American Indians and Alaska Natives share a long history of oral tradition through legends and folklore. This has historically been the means of preserving information. Oral storytelling by Elders, parents, teachers, and other community members is still a way of sharing values and traditions with young children by the adults who care for them.
- Young children possess a natural curiosity that can be nurtured through their senses by studying their physical surroundings such as the plants, rocks, and vegetation within their immediate surroundings.

- Every culture also has its unique art and music form which young children can be introduced to and come to appreciate.
- Even very young children can come to appreciate, respect, and take pride in their own culture, this effort will later help them to understand others who may have different cultural traditions.
- In multicultural settings, young children can also be helped to expand their cultural understandings through sharing their own unique experiences.

Early intervention for American Indians and Alaska Natives should not result in the loss of the child's home language and culture.

> Cultural-based curriculum can be introduced at any grade level, although it is best to introduce such information early in a child's development. ... It is more natural for children to learn positive or at least neutral facts about American Indian\Alaska Native groups on an ongoing, preferably daily, basis than to study them for but one day or one week out of the school year. (NEA, 1983, p. 15)

Parents Aid in Bridging the Gap between Home and School

One of the most important issues in Native education in general and in early education in particular is the nature of the relationship between the parents and the educators. However, Dr. Swan, a Native American educator from Rocky Boy School in Montana, states that, "Parent involvement seems to be the #1 problem that surfaces in any survey of Indian Education" (High Plains Hearing, 1990, p. 6).

The whole issue of early childhood education cannot be discussed without consideration of the family. The notion of education being what happens in school and not what happens at home has to be modified. The parents response to school reflects their acceptance or rejection of what happens at school.

Successful programs such as Head Start and Follow Through encourage parents to become involved in the school. One of the biggest issues, however, is, "How can we get parents, many of whom work full time, involved in their child's school program."

Unfortunately, there are very few success stories of parents and educators working together effectively which we can point to for guidance and insight. As Polly Greenberg, the editor of the NAEYC Journal, in reporting on parent programs observed of this issue, "Nationwide there are only a handful of schools that exemplify maximum feasible parent participation or even approach significant levels of involvement" (1989, p. 74). There are a handful of exemplary American Indian and Alaska Native programs where we can learn the lessons of the power of parents as a resource and the ways in which this resource can be harnessed.

One such exemplary program is the Wounded Knee School in Manderson, South Dakota. At their elementary school, the attendance rate of 1989 was 97.8 percent. Charlotte Black Elk, a school board member, claims that, "We have done this by including parents as a key part of the programs. Each parent is required to spend a certain amount of time in their child's classroom" (High Plains Hearing, 1990, p. 6). She goes on to explain that such a high rate of parental participation is possible because of the compactness and smallness of the community which allows them to "draw on the talents within the community and do innovative programs" (p. 6).

Another example of a successful program which draws on the parents as a resource is the Red Lake School in Minnesota. The high school has an in-school day care and pre-school for the children of the teen parents. This program has not only been successful in keeping young parents in school, but it has also successfully adapted the extended family model to the school setting. Grandparents are hired to work in the day care center an the pre-school where the teaching is in both English and Ojibwa. The young parents are required to take at least two courses related to family and parenting and the Elders are used to help teach these courses. This is truly an example of using the parents and grandparents as a resource in a way that is culturally compatible with the traditional extended family learning model of this Native American community.

The need to bring home and school together is important and needs to be considered so by parents and employers. Most jobs on and off the reservation grant parents sick leave and time off to vote. Parents should be able to initiate a day off which will allow them to visit their young children's school without penalty. This is of high value and an important investment. Not every parent has to visit at the same time, but the value of visiting school should be supported and/or mandated in the community.

A key underlying tenant of American Indian and Alaska Native culture is the importance of family relationships. The majority of families have very strong family ties. Some of this strength has been lost because of the forced relocations and

economic associations that American Indians and Alaska Natives have had to make, but when maintained to any degree, there is a very strong extended family tie that exists. Nurturing this concept must become a priority.

If, as Native people, we want children to grow and to value their immediate and extended family, then we must continue to support family experiences outside of the home. This can be done by developing a parent connection with the school. The parent and the school, both, must not see themselves as a separate entity, but they must work cooperatively and collaboratively in rearing and educating young children. The school and parents must work in concert with each other rather than at cross purposes. Communities must insist upon and initiate such a relationship if quality early care and education is to happen outside the home.

A related issue to the efforts of utilizing parents in early schooling and regular school programs is the policy of desegregation. For Native Americans living in urban settings, the civil rights initiatives to desegregate our city schools has often had the effect of isolating Native American students. In Minneapolis, where there are only approximately 600 Native American students, the number of students at any one school became so small that the students and families felt isolated and the delivery of educational services intended specifically for Native American students became difficult. As Charlotte Black Elk pointed out, the concentration of a community makes it possible for parents and community experts to participate in the educational program of their children in a more consistent and meaningful way. Not surprisingly, some of the most successful urban educational programs are Native American magnet schools which have been able to assemble a critical mass of Native American students and families for the purposes of shaping, influencing, and participating in the educational process (Great Lakes Hearing, Tanner, 1990, pp. 57-58).

There is ample evidence that involving parents of children in school increases their chances of success (Burgess, 1982; Henderson, 1987; Nation At Risk, 1983; Wells, 1986). This evidence supports a position of the school respecting the home culture and asking the community to participate because they see the community as a resource of information that the teachers perhaps don't have. The child then recognizes that the home culture is valued and respected. In this context, schools and teachers, in particular, need to examine what kind of messages they are relaying to children, particularly very young children. "There is a lack of understanding of the Indian ways, which in turn leads into a problem with parental involvement" (Plains Hearing, Huston, 1990, p. 24).

The gap that has existed for too long between home and school must be closed in order for American Indian and Alaska Native children to successfully move back and forth between home and school. The following strategies will help build the links between home and early childhood education programs.

- It must be acknowledged that parents are their children's first teachers, and the home is the first center of development. Bridging school experiences with home experiences is a cornerstone commitment to early childhood education. (TEEM, 1989, p. 1)
- Parent participation in decision-making regarding educational, health, or community policy for their children must become a collaborative effort with the school.
- Parents must be involved in both planning and implementing school programs by becoming full partners with the school.
- Parents must become resources and community participation must be encouraged in order to maintain cultural influence on their children and to preserve tribal traditions.

Finally, it seems that not only do preschools and public schools have to successfully solicit parent involvement, but they must also offer the parents educational and self-improvement opportunities (Eastern Regional Hearing, Fowler, 1990, p. 26). Many early education literacy researchers are pointing to the critical factor of parent literacy level in predicting the literacy success of the child as support for parent literacy school programs (Burgess, 1983; Leler, in press; Swift, 1970). The Colville Tribes of Washington State have used Title V funds to increase their parents literacy skill levels and also to train the parents in specific strategies for helping their children with school work. This has helped them bring many of their students up to grade level (Aripa, 1990).

Challenge for the Early Childhood Education Programs: Accommodating Diverse American Indian and Alaska Native Children

In helping the home and school to come closer together, teachers need to be reeducated. In the past, schools have often been patronizing toward parents. Teachers have been led to undervalue the knowledge of parents and the importance of the parents' role in the educational process. There are many missing pieces in the teacher's education regarding some of the strategies that they can use to encourage parent participation. It is important, for instance, for teachers to meet parents; to walk home with a child; to want to meet and get acquainted with the rest of the family; to be able to go into a home and be welcomed as a person who is sharing in the education of their child.

In urban areas where a teacher does not always live in the community, it is more difficult for this to happen. But even in city neighborhood schools, inservice days or release time should be set aside so that teachers can visit the homes of their students. When the teachers live in a reservation community, they need to become part of that community. It is up to the school then to have an ongoing process, to make it a viable option for teachers to become members of the community. The schools should actually encourage support of and participation in community activities by their teachers. In the past, the teachers have not really been encouraged to participate in some of the activities that the community holds.

In an urban setting teachers may have only one or two Native children who may not even live in the same neighborhood, but nonetheless are in the class. They may be from different tribes, but the teacher still needs to also find out what kinds of resources those children have access to and what kinds of experiences they have had. The teacher must find out about them, not necessarily to teach the whole class, but to help herself and the children to become closer, so that she can reach out to meet their needs. Their needs are going to be different from students in the mainstream culture. There are also Native children who have only been raised in an urban setting and who may have only limited experiences and knowledge of their culture's traditional lifestyle. Conversely, other children are actually continuing the trek back and forth from urban settings to the reservations to maintain their traditions. The parents of these children may take the time from work, take the children out of school, and participate in certain critical traditional activities or ceremonies. They feel that it is valuable enough to remove the child to do this and the school needs to respect their actions. When this traditional upbringing is valued by the parents, it should be encouraged by the school. For the child who may not have much information about his/her own cultural traditions, it is very critical that the teacher begin to find and introduce information and cultural resources to the child. Material is available about tribal groups and about the various tribal traditions. Teachers may consider taking field trips to visit a school setting with a high Native population, inviting groups from the reservation to visit a class, or exchanging letters with a reservation class.

On the reservation it would be helpful for new teachers to be able to meet with parents of young children and do some exchanging of information before a child comes to school. The parent does not always have to come to the school. The school could go to the parent. Meetings could be set up with two or three people at a time for sharing and exchanging. This will help both parties decide what is needed for their children. Conferencing informally on a small group or one-to-one basis can be profitable. Robert Jones of the BLM Partnership program stated, "Our experience with one-to-one work with parents of Native students has been very successful" (Alaska Hearing, 1990, p. 40).

A kindergarten teacher in the Juneau testimony discussed why a strong outreach effort is needed from the teachers and the school. Many times schools expect the parents to make all the effort. Elizabeth Hope says, "It is the teacher's job to play a larger role in the public outreach" (Alaska Hearing, 1990, p.51). By simply endorsing the use of the school site for community events and meetings, the school would become more linked with the community (NEA, 1983). Where this kind of commitment occurs, the community sees the school more positively.

One difficulty in hiring and keeping good teachers on reservation schools is culture shock for the teacher. The reservation is a different world for non-Native teachers. It would help teachers if they became a part of the community, because they would get to see and know the parents. Instead, reservation teachers often live in a compound where they actually isolate themselves from the community. The Native families must in turn accept teachers into the community. Sometimes there are barriers that are built unintentionally. Many well meaning, talented people who have gone on reservations to teach, have not been successful because they have not taken advantage of

the opportunity they have to really get to know the people.

Too often teachers begin teaching without the orientation and information they need to work within a reservation school system. Their own set ideas regarding the educational process may not take into consideration the cultural values of the community, nor are they familiar with seasonal activities of the children and the community. When teachers don't feel comfortable, they tend to isolate themselves within their own teacher cliques. This presents a dilemma for parents who would like to meet them. One suggestions from the hearings included that: "All teachers in villages receive intense cross-cultural training, like the Peace Corps, so that they can understand the Native language, culture, and history (Alaska Hearing, Wulf-Shircel, 1990, p. 15).

The school will never really know if there is a discontinuity between what they are teaching and what the children bring with them unless they really know what the community is about, what the people are about — what the values are (Northwest Hearing, Hampton, 1990). Only this kind of effort will help to do away with the discontinuity between the value systems and the different views that people have who come from outside (Cazden, 1982; Hartle-Shutte, 1988).

Sometimes teachers see their job narrowly, only in terms of school achievement, as opposed to thinking about building a future for young children. It is critical to the growth of students for teachers to realize that there are resources in the community and that bringing in the community to share some of their legends and some of the traditions with the children is vital. Teachers need to take advantage of the community resources. Schools need to identify and tap what Luis Moll has labeled the "funds of knowledge in the community" (1988). Most people are willing to come and help, if schools would go to them and say, "I know that you can do this. I know that you have this information. I know that you have a skill or talent. Would you come and share it with my class?" Most Elders and parents are willing to do that (Alaska Hearing, Armstrong, Wulf-Shircel, 1990). The elderly are an especially rich resource (Alaska Hearing, Anderson 1990; Plains Hearing, Onco, 1990).

Within the context of the setting of day care or Head Start preschools or public schools, particularly for reservation children, school personnel must bring the community into the preschool. Ideally, you could go into the classroom and know what cultural groups are represented within that group of students. You should be able to look at the classroom and the children and know you are on the Apache Reservation or the Hopi Reservation or that you are on the Tohono O'odham Reservation. The school should reflect the culture of the children through pictures and traditional kinds of artifacts that say these are the things that are valued by the people in this community. You should be able to go into the classroom and view a science table that has the things that grow locally and the things that are out in the community that can be used. Anything can be used for scientific purposes if you are going to look at it, break it, and examine it closer. The children's work should be displayed. Whatever pictures are in the classroom environment should have some resemblance to what is happening at home or in the community. There needs to be a balance in the classroom environment between what the community is about, what the teacher is teaching, and its relatedness to what is happening to the children involved.

This is especially important for younger children in preschools when there are very few content areas that are covered in school which do not or cannot relate to what the children's experiences are. Teachers should be able to use a guide book and take the suggested example and translate it to relate to children in the community. If this is done by teachers and child care givers, along with providing models of the people like them for their children, children will be more successful in building a positive self-awareness and be more accepting of what we give them in school.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children maintains that, "Every child, except in the most severe instances of abuse, neglect, or disability, enters school ready to learn" (NAEYC, 1990b, p. 1). The NAEYC statement on readiness goes on to identify the following three areas which early childhood programs must address:

1. The societal inequities which affect the nature and quality of the child's early life experiences must be balanced so that all children will have experiences which will lead to school success.
2. The individual differences inherent within any group of children must be recognized and fostered.
3. Age appropriate expectations for and understanding of children's capabilities when entering school must be established.

Our current definition of readiness focuses the blame for early school failure on the child through a deficit model. It neither takes into account the differing range of experiences which children have had nor the individual differences in aptitudes and

interests of children. Frequently this becomes a case of blaming the victim, who may have had limited opportunity to engage in school readiness experiences. The measures used to assess readiness have been faulty also, because of sometimes inappropriate identification of the essential readiness skills and the failure to allow for normal individual variation in the rate of maturation and learning. The NAEYC instead advocates that schools do what Dewey suggested (Dewey, 1916), and meet the students where they are, developmentally and experientially, and then provide them with the experiences and guidance necessary to help each child reach his or her full potential.

Perhaps the biggest readiness issue of all in Native American education is the ethnocentric nature of how we have defined and measured readiness. Our assumptions about which experiences are valuable, which skills are necessary and what knowledge is important for the young child are cultural ones, which may not have much validity for cross-cultural and multi-cultural populations. Robert Lake, a member of the Cherokee and Seneca tribes and an associate professor at Gonzaga University, makes the point when writing about his own son's kindergarten experiences that culturally different is by no means the same as culturally disadvantaged (Lake, 1990). Unfortunately, his son's school and by, extension, our public education system tends to label children as "not ready" or "slow learners" because the knowledge and skills which they enter school with are different from that which a middle-class child brings to kindergarten. In Mr. Lake's and my opinion, it is the school's definition of and understanding of readiness which must be changed and broadened and not the culturally specific knowledge and skills which Native American preschoolers have acquired. Schools, beginning with readiness, should not be in the business of compensatory education, but instead they should be designed to enhance and support the culturally bound and individually determined readiness skills with which all children come to school. It is the readiness skills and knowledge of the schools that must be assessed, expanded, and improved.

At the Plains Regional Hearing (1990), Karen Onco presented a list of school readiness concerns with the following suggestions for strategies to address these concerns:

- We need to prepare for school readiness through home support.
- We need preventive health screening for young preschool children.
- We need transportation provision to help get Indian children to Head Start programs.
- Children need more manipulative experiences as well as concrete-operation learning using culturally-related curriculum.
- We need the school environment to reflect the nationality of the students in the classroom as well as teacher education in multicultural education.
- We need Elders and parents to volunteer in preschool environments.
- We need culturally-related books and material for home use. We also need provisions for financial support to purchase materials and loan them for home-use. This would be a means of outreach to parents. (1990, p. 16)

The following are additional strategies for providing successful early care and education:

- Link home learning with school learning.
- Use Elders, parents and community members as a resource.
- Educate non-native teachers and administrators about the local tribes.
- Strong outreach efforts must be established by the schools.
- Assist teachers in becoming aware and participating community members.
- Train more Native teachers and administrators by using alternative certification procedures.
- Promote, maintain and encourage Native language use, particularly with younger children.
- Establish a culturally-based curriculum relevant to the children being taught.
- Include cultural awareness courses in teacher training.
- Hire Native aides as language and cultural models but also train them in child development principles.
- Increase Head Start availability for all who wish to participate. "Parent income level eligibility requirements for Head Start should be less restrictive ... but should be based on the community needs of the tribe/reservation" (Hearings Summary, 1990, p. 11).

- Have communities involved in the development of curriculum.

The Community's Contribution to Strong Early Childhood Education

Exploring the community is a very important aspect of any kind of teaching process that children go through. Parents initiate observation of their environment, but the school needs to continue this process.

> As a tribe, we pay tribute to the wisdom and vision of our Elders. They are our link to the past, and they fought for our future. We also love and cherish our youth, for they are our link to the future. We think of ourselves as a whole, as a unified body, as a tribe, and that is how we address our problems. (Alaska Hearing, Anderson, 1990, p. 16)

A common theme in the testimony and writing is the importance of developing more Native teachers and administrators (Great Lakes Hearing, DeCramer, 1990, p. 53; Northwest Hearing, Egawa, 1990, p. 27; Southwest Hearing, Nelson, 1990, p. 29; Swisher, 1990, p. 9). Programs are needed to encourage young people to go into the field of education to be teachers. Also, alternative programs for teacher certification, or certifying the Elders for the knowledge that they have and letting them work with the children would be beneficial to preschools especially (Great Lakes Hearing, Gipp, 1990, p. 13; Nerburn, p. 18).

Another critical element of a successful educational program is helping children to understand that they have choices. Occasionally there are some extremes when we talk about consequences, but it is not usually in relationship to good or bad; instead it is more often a case of looking at alternative ways of approaching some sort of a task. A very important strategy in working with Native Americans is that teachers must develop more than one approach to any kind of task. Teachers must see children as being unique, as being individual, and having different styles of learning. Thus, there will to be alternative ways for children to complete a task, no matter how small a task may be: "... Incorporate a variety of teaching styles and methodologies that coincide with American Indian and Alaska Native students background" (NEA, 1983, p. 39, 42; Northwest Hearing, Davis, 1990).

Choice is something that is a part of the unwritten curriculum which is essential for people to master so that they can succeed as part of the larger society. This process begins in a child's home. An example is with children at mealtime. Parents say, "You may have corn flakes; you may have Cheerios; or you may have shredded wheat." What they are really saying to the child is "You're going to have some cereal this morning, but your choice is among these three." Thus the child is able to decide, "Okay, I want Cheerios," and they have made a choice. They have practiced making a choice, and the parent still has had jurisdiction over what that child is going to eat. Food may not be the best kind of example if there is not much variety available, but you can practice in other situations with children, such as at bedtime. For instance, reminding a child that it is close to bedtime and bathtime and they may choose to have a story read or maybe a snack before bathtime or after bathtime, then off to bed is the expectation that is set.

One consequence affecting the role of parenting is the experiences many American Indian and Native Alaska parents had attending boarding school. There students were told when to get up, when to eat, when to study, when they could leave campus, and when they could have visitors. Basically, all decisions were made for them. At the end of their stay, students were turned loose and told, "Now, you're on your own." As students they had limited opportunity to make many decisions. One does not easily make big decisions wisely unless opportunities have been provided to exercise judgment while making choices and looking at alternatives. In many cities where there are large Native populations, Native Americans have developed Indian Centers (Great Lakes Hearing, 1990; Northwest Hearing, 1990, p. 2). Within the context of that Indian Center they have chosen to share some of their experiences as members of different tribes and have discovered the commonalities among them. In these urban settings, inter-tribal communities are formed through the sharing of potluck dinners, talking about recent visits home, or discussing what is happening to them as a family in the context of the city. These relationships and alliances can serve as stabilizing factors. The Indian Center is one place where different age groups can get together. They have programs for very young children, for the adults, and for the elderly. Adult interaction can be directed at training for specific skills or simply gaining needed information, in terms of exchanging information about raising children, health issues, or nutrition.

The Circle of Learning, located in Denver, is a children and family services program that focuses on nurturing the Native child, parents and family (Harjo & Russell, 1990). Client services include early childhood education classes for children ages

2 1/2 to 5 years old, in-home instruction for children 0-5, and parent education classes. The project was developed in response to the expressed need of the Denver Native community for an opportunity to participate more fully in the larger society and still retain their roots and cultural heritage (National Advisory Council on Indian Education, 1989, p. 127).

Just as traditions were relayed orally in the past, Natives still come together to share information and tradition through talking together. Sharing does not necessarily have to be in a formal institutional setting. It is vital for parents to have opportunities for this supportive interaction in the urban centers, particularly, because the extended family support system is less likely to be present.

The meeting of specific Native community needs is often affected by the overlapping jurisdiction of various agencies that exists on a reservation. When asking parents to take part in making decisions, we need to think about the economy in personal terms: where parents are making a living; what it is they are doing with their children in trying to get them educated, i.e, whether the state or the tribe or the government has made the provision for the schooling of children; and what kind of messages are being sent to them by multiple agencies as a family.

The economic resource, such as a BIA school or government agency does provide positive economic contributions to the reservation. On the other hand, the same agency may be a destructive force in terms of maintaining the culture; the community has to weigh these benefits against the costs when considering what is best for the tribe, particularly the future of young children. The people are reluctant to change the status quo, because it is their source of income. However, the economic support might be from an institution that is working to eliminate the language and culture or exert force in that direction in order to facilitate some of the changes that as an agency it is trying to make (McDonald, 1989b).

The goals set by Native communities, however, will not be reached without help, support, and commitment. The schools must come to acknowledge, respect, and understand the child's language, culture, and community. Through parental insistence there must be incorporation of cultural information and values in the curriculum. American Indian and Alaska Native communities must contribute to the development of policies and practices. The Bureau of Indian Affairs, at this point, is turning over its responsibility to some of the different tribes. The tribes are taking over some of the functions or policy setting roles that the Bureau has had in the past. This is a step in the right direction. Tribes are beginning to build community and tribal schools and implement some of the policies that they want for their children and tribal group. Community schools are what many Native parents view as a possible answer to their frustration with the public school system. It is here that they view a better system of "Indian" education. The expectation must be there for a culturally congruent curriculum, caring and nurturing staff, individualized learning, and an environment where the Native student will want to succeed and develop their full potential (Martin, 1990). A major way to accomplish this task is by helping young American Indians and Alaska Natives to become teachers, leaders, and administrators (NEA, 1990). This can only happen if from the beginning of their schooling the young children are taught the language and traditions of their culture.

Another way of providing continuity is for the community is to take charge of the school. It will then be the community providing the continuity, and the teacher will be a resource or specialist who comes in to teach in the community's school. The continuity will exist if it is the community which designs the curriculum and if the curriculum reflects the community's vision of what the children are to become. In this model it is not as critical for a teacher to stay a certain length of time, because the community will be the backbone of the school. Communities must recognize that they, and they alone, have this power and are the ones that either exercise it or do not. Successful Native American educational programs are found only in the places where communities have exercised this power (NEA, 1983, p. 49).

There must be trust between the community and the teachers so that the teachers can consider themselves the advisers and the parents will be the ones who should be deciding the curriculum (Great Lakes Hearing, Christensen, 1990, p. 52). The teachers are the specialists with some knowledge, but the parents and community should be controlling the process and asking for the advice that they want for their purposes. "Explore what Native Americans see as the purpose of education. What are the aspirations that communities have for their children" (Alaska Hearing, Arnold, 1990, p. 46).

Various service agencies that are funded to help families, often become entities into themselves, and do not necessarily serve families as a whole. Often parents have a complex, confusing network they have to go through instead of being able to go to one agency and say, "These are the kinds of things that I need for my family." Needs may be

in terms of financial assistance, whether it be clothing, medical assistance, or pre-natal care. In the rural areas, in particular, there ought to be one place where families could go and request services. When there are people specializing in specific areas, they ought to be available to serve a family. This combined effort could reduce administrative costs, and the money could be spent to help provide service people. Differing needs of the community and the families must be considered in this decision-making (Eastern Hearing, Johnson, 1990, p. 24).

Services are provided in Head Start for preventive efforts, so that children are diagnosed early if they need assistance, i.e., vaccinations, hearing aids, dietary needs. Parents who do not have these services for their children should be alerted as to where their children may receive these services.

Pre-natal care, especially for teenage girls in high school, is crucial for the baby as well as the mother. If they do become pregnant, young women should not be left to fend for themselves. The family or an agency should bring them in, rather than wait for the pregnant teen to come, and the community must say, "You need to take care of yourself. Here are some things that you will need to do." There are enough organizations that every young person should know another adult who could find someone to fulfill critical needs. In addition to the need for prenatal care for young parents, the importance of teenage Native parents receiving training in parenting skills must also be recognized (Hearings Summary, 1990, p. 11). Using Elders to work with young parents can be beneficial to all involved.

Whiteriver Elementary School in the Apache community of Whiteriver, Arizona, has linked social service agencies and schools from Head Start to high school with parent involvement and parent education programs. A unique component of this comprehensive program is a special parenting class for high school students. This program offers parenting skills to teenage mothers and to young women, who as a result of participation in the program often decide to wait a few years before having children (White, 1990).

In the Alaskan testimony it was mentioned that one of the main reasons communities want early childhood care is so that the young teenage parents can go back to school and finish their education (Anderson, 1990, p. 17).

Every community is different, so that it is very important that every community take a look at who they are, what services they have, and how they might work together. Because funding is generally being reduced, the services could be maintained with a careful collaborative effort among agencies.

A Promising Model for Evaluation

In a 1989 report by Native educators titled, *Our Voices, Our Vision*, the effects of research and publication on American Indian and Alaska Native culture is discussed.

> As a result of racism, greed, and distorted perceptions of native realities, Indian culture as an economic commodity has been exploited by the dominant society with considerable damage to Indian people. Tribal people need to safeguard the borders of their cultural domains against research and publishing projects. (1989, p. 6)

There should be a similar safeguard for evaluation of early childhood education. As Tigges and Zastrow say:

> Evaluators frequently find themselves in a social context different than the one in which they were trained to be evaluators, and occasionally, very different from the social context in which the concepts of social science research were developed. However, this difference is rarely accounted for in the evaluation they are asked to do. ... Evaluators are asked to do acceptable social science evaluation of programs whose participants are from a culture with basic assumptions different than those of Western science. At the very least, this poses problems in communication. More seriously, it may lead the evaluators to inadvertently violate certain tribal customs, which results in the failure of the study and a loss of trust from the tribal (sic) for them and other outsiders. (1981, p. 11)

A more promising model for evaluation would be for researchers to become knowledgeable about child development principles and how they apply to the milestones held by a cultural group. Evaluators must develop "more democratic, culturally appropriate means of evaluating and incorporating parental input into their children's educational futures. Researchers must free themselves from the traditional hard science model of research and formulate a more qualitative collection of information designed to feed back to communities — families and educators — rather than to continue to violate or undermine family primary rights to the education of their children. Integrity must be maintained in data collation, yet underlay the information with new considerations as to the implications for families from varying cultural backgrounds. The advantage of this kind of evalua-

tion is to help establish a kind of "paradigm" in which the use of data collected empowers the primary participants" (Schlessman-Frost, 1990). In "Alternative Model for Program Evaluation of Cultural Based Communities: An Evaluation of the Santa Clara Pueblo Head Start Program," the evaluators designed and implemented "an evaluation to suit Santa Clara's needs, fitting it into the context of the Pueblo culture yet maintaining certain standards of objectivity and respect for the cultural sensitivity of the people" (Tigges & Zastrow, 1981, p. 4).

Strategies for Culturally Appropriate Evaluation of Early Childhood Education

The following strategies suggest a set of policies, which would give direction for culturally appropriate evaluation of early childhood education in American Indian and Alaska Native communities. They have been adapted from the policy recommendations suggested by Schlessman-Frost in "Multicultural Educational Evaluation: A Democratic Model and Some Policy Recommendations" (in press).

- Participants (parents, children, child care providers) in a democratic evaluation process should use their language of choice when providing input.
- The perceptions (criteria for worth) of those affected by the early childhood education process should be incorporated into the evaluation goals.
- Cultural values should be given high priority and not violated by the evaluation procedures. The worth of these values does not have to be "proven" or justified to some funding agency or to the mainstream educational research and evaluation elite.
- Ethnoscientific studies to establish cultural relevancy for early childhood education goals should be incorporated into the evaluation categories.
- The methods and instruments of the evaluation should be developed by or in collaboration with those participating in the educational process.
- The design of the evaluation; its goals, methods, instruments; should be formulated in and run parallel to the group processes being evaluated.
- Results of educational evaluation, which are generated by culturally biased assumptions and instruments, specifically standardized test score, should not be published as negative reflections on those communities involved (Williams, 1990). There should be a community privacy of information rule.
- Shared, cultural values among American Indians and Alaska Natives should be used to identify the enlightened self-interest procedures for community education.
- Evaluations, which open options and contribute to shared futures for multiple cultures, should set guidelines for "new" educational evaluation and research paradigms.

The exciting possibility for everyone involved (evaluator, educator, parent, child) is to turn the evaluation process into a contributing part of the growth for the community. The purpose should not be research for research sake or evaluation for evaluation, but should be to contribute directly back to the community. Unfortunately, community re-information has been rare.

Summary

Looking at formative years, we have to consider who is it that the community wants their children to become when they leave? What kinds of values are held by that community? What ideas are planted in children during these early years? Historically, children being taken from their homes at an early age and taken to a boarding schools was a tragedy. Some dysfunction of the family stems from the different conditions imposed upon Native Americans. Children have sometimes been given limited information and sometimes they make their own interpretations, but nonetheless an idea has been planted. It should instead be a positive idea, such as accepting of the elderly as a rich resource. That is a very important concept. It may be their understanding of their role as a part of a family. That also is a very important concept. These values that are instilled early need to be fostered by the school so the child will retain them.

The American Indian and Alaska Native population is growing above the national average. This means there are going to be more children, thus the community needs to be very conscious of what kind of adults it wants these children to become. Among the values that should be preserved are tribal history and culture, because it is so important for a people to know who they are, where they come from, and what they have because of who they are. It can be very detrimental not to have this sense of identity. In helping our children

maintain, or at least be aware of their Native culture, we are nurturing self-identity and building a foundation for secure adulthood.

The decisions regarding the early care and education of young American Indians and Alaska Natives are of a serious nature. The issues are complex and challenging.

The goals which are established for young American Indian and Alaska Native children must not be limited to short term benefits such as getting a child ready for school or getting him/her ready for the next grade. A more important priority is the long-range goal of assisting our young people to become productive individuals who practice their thinking skills in decision-making. Individuals are needed by the tribes who will be capable of providing leadership, management, and models for maintaining the strengths of their tribal identity.

In making provisions for early care and education for younger American Indians and Alaska Natives, we must reflect on the dangers of losing Native language through which Native speakers share rules for what Barbara Bowman refers to as "making meaning." She also states that "Culture forms a prism through which members of a group see the world and create 'shared meanings'" (Bowman, 1989, p. 118).

The National Association for Bilingual Education (NABE) No Cost Study on Families released a press brief at a recent conference , which indicates that:

> In a nationwide survey of families, volunteer researchers have found evidence of serious disruptions of family relations occurring when young children learn English in school and lose the use of the home language. This finding supports other research that documents the benefits of native language preschool programs. The study revealed that while language minority parents recognize the importance of English and want their children to learn it at school, they do not want it at the expense of loss of the home language. Many of the parents expressed a concern that their children will lose their language and become estranged from their families and cultural heritage. Others reported that their children had already lost or were losing the language.
>
> ... The study is a reaction by children's and family advocates to current efforts to get non-English speakers as young a three and four years of age into preschool programs where they can be taught English before kindergarten. Language learning theorists contend that such preschool programs are linguistically and culturally unsound, and may have negative consequences on the language, social, and intellectual development of children. (Wong Fillmore, 1990, p. 1)

President Bush in October of this past year signed into law the Native American Language Act which reverses a 104-year-old federal policy on the destruction of Native languages (Locke, 1990). The effects of this policy have resulted in 40 to 60 Native languages being exterminated and only 160 Native languages remain alive out of an estimated 600 languages that were spoken by American Indians and Alaska Natives at the time of Christopher Columbus' arrival.

Federal law Public Law 101-477 has been passed and provides us the right to preserve, protect and promote the rights and freedom of Native Americans to use, practice, and develop Native languages.

Every tribal chairman must request copies of this law and plan ways to implement the eight provisions included (Locke, 1990).

The door has been opened if we as American Indians and Alaska Natives accept the challenge to maintain the integrity of our tribal identity. Instilling the home language in young children is one of the keys for American Indian and Alaska Native children to grow knowing traditions, culture, history, and most importantly take pride in who they are. It is vital to give young children this strong foundation which will assist them to be successful throughout their schooling so they may be able to choose where their future contributions will be.

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